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INTRODUCTION TO SOCIOLOGY. IX.
PART III. GENERAL STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY.
CHAPTER VII. THE SOCIAL FRONTIERS.—*Continued.*

SECTION II. BASES FURNISHED BY THE PRECEDING INDUCTIONS.

AFTER having defined the social aggregate, the mass produced by the union of different substances, territory, and population, united as a whole at the moment of their formation into a combination which is neither exclusively material nor exclusively biological, but something more complex and more special, we have seen that this is an external and internal equilibrium.

Every social aggregate, like all organic matter, has a form, a structure. Its equilibrium is always unstable. Increase of mass is at once the first and most simple characteristic of its differentiation. A quantitative variation is always the origin of a qualitative variation.

Every social aggregate, whatever may be its mass, having a form, is necessarily limited. This is true even if it includes the entire planet and all peoples. In fact, social material, territory, and population, is limited. All the forces and properties of nature are likewise limited—the mathematical, mechanical, astronomical, physical, and chemical forces. Organized material is, in its turn, limited. This point is important, for organized matter corresponds directly to that super-organic matter to which we give the name “social.” This should be insisted upon; not only are its properties limited, but also its form. This is true for the simplest living matter. As M. Le Dantée has set forth so well in his *Traité de biologie*, a very important result of the viscosity of living matter is that any mass of such matter has *a form* in water, whereas a freely soluble substance is gradually diffused throughout the vessel in which it is dissolved. When we see any living body, we are first of all impressed by its form, by the apparent contour of the body. We see that a constant parallelism exists between the form and the chemical nature of

living bodies, *i. e.*, between their contour and their composition. I call attention to this law; it is important because it gives us a glimpse of the scientific theory of social frontiers; that is to say, of the external and differentiated aspects of society, as we shall develop below. Between the biological and the sociological theories there is little difference, just as there is between the biological and the physico-mechanical theories.

Let us suppose, with M. Le Dantée, that a certain amount of oil is poured into a salt solution of the same density. The oil will take the form of a sphere and will remain in equilibrium. If the solution is perfectly quiet, a sphere of large dimensions can be formed. If on the other hand, the liquid is violently agitated, the oil will break up into a large number of small spheres, as small as the agitation is great; the degree of agitation determines the dimensions possible for the particles of the oil.

It is the same in organized matter. On a level with the line of separation of living protoplasm from its surroundings a series of changes continually exists, which develops in that separating zone an intense agitation. The limitations of normal dimensions of the masses of protoplasm is then a very natural phenomenon. Limitation necessarily results, for there is no more absolute rest in protoplasm than in the liquid or the drop of oil. Not only is the greatest dimension of the protoplasmic masses limited, but the form of these masses results from the mechanical conditions about them, caused by molar movement, by changes. But M. Le Dantée concludes:

This movement is the result, partly of the nature of the substance of the protoplasm, a nature peculiar to the chemical composition of protoplasm, and partly of the chemical reactions within the protoplasm which keep up the molar movement, and which depend upon the chemical composition of the protoplasm as well as upon the nature of the chemical elements borrowed from *milieu*.

The form of living substances is the result of their state of equilibrium. This is why, so long as an animal lives, its substance, being of spherical units, always tends to maintain, while growing, the form which is the specific form of its own

equilibrium. At the same time, we see how, as soon as an agglomeration of cellules is formed and limited by a superficies, some of these cellules—those that are superficial and directly in contact with the surroundings—tend to be differentiated and to play the rôle of officers of foreign affairs.

This primary differentiation is the expression of the constant changes taking place between the interior and the exterior. It is this continual movement which, incessantly renewing living matter, constitutes life. The *form* of a living body appears to us then, not as predetermined, but as resulting from the equilibrium of its forces or properties in interaction with the exterior forces or properties.

The materials and organic forces, as well as their forms, being limited, we have seen that their possible variations, though innumerable, are also limited. The variability is not absolute, but indefinite. This is true of the human species; its physical and mental properties are circumscribed by relative maxima and relative minima. This limitation has been observed in pathology of the mind (suicide and lunacy).

After having set forth the constant limitations of the natural forces considered in their abstract elements, we have recognized the same law in aggregates where these forces are realized. This limitation is manifested in the distribution of climates, in that of geological layers and minerals, in geographic, orographic, and hydrographic distribution. It holds in the distribution of flora and of fauna. We have observed veritable empires and kingdoms, and other and smaller divisions, with clearly defined boundaries, which are always determined by the great law of equilibrium of internal forces interacting with external forces. Finally, we have met with the distribution of the human race. We have seen that its divisions into varieties and races has been the natural process by which it has succeeded in adapting itself, better than any other species, to the most diverse conditions, but always within certain limits, which are those of that condition of life. The great variability of the human species has been the condition of its progress. Its differentiation into races and sub-races has facilitated the colonization of the earth, but, in return,

it has engendered conflicts. These variations have not ceased, nor will they cease, but will tend more and more to reproduce themselves by a process equally natural and more efficacious from now on—one of mingling and of fusion, which will still further multiply the varieties, extending them, and reinforcing the fundamental and uniform characteristics of the species. These variations multiply and specialize more and more, and thereby they continue the work of adaptation at first realized by the races. We are in the presence, not of two contradictory natural processes, but of a unique law. It is not natural selection, as is very often said, which is the cause of these variations. Natural selection is only the selective process which makes it possible that among the existing variations those which are advantageous to individuals and to society in the actual circumstances are conserved. But now it has become more advantageous, for completing the conquest and assimilation of the earth by the human species, that mankind be divided into innumerable small groups rather than into a few strong groups. This infinite number of groups, indispensable for the assimilation of the globe, now that its occupation by degrees, is nearly accomplished, is realized by the fusion of races. This fusion is a progress of variability, an extension, a perfecting of this law. The Darwinian law of the struggle for existence is not abolished, but transformed, reinforced by the law of the meaning of life.

After all that precedes, the reader is now able to catch a glimpse of the positive theory of social frontiers. The solution of the problem is neither in the preservation of the actual limits nor in their removal for the profit of a sentimental cosmopolitanism, vague and undetermined, under which is concealed too often an aristocratic individualism. Every social group is necessarily limited. The properties of the groups are the same as the properties of the materials of which the group is composed. The limitation of every society is a condition of its equilibrium, of its life, of its development. The existence of every society, special or general, is correlative with the existence of a social form. Form implies a boundary, a zone of separation between that society and its surroundings. But we have seen already from

biology that this bounding zone, far from being an obstacle to social intercourse, is the indispensable condition of it. The evolution of its function leads us to conceive it as the same organ produced by the differentiation of these relations. Let us be content with this first information furnished by the principle of all the sciences antecedent to sociology. Let us not be content, however, as the organicist school has been with deducing the theory of social frontiers from that of the limits of organized matter, and even from that of inorganic matter, or from the laws of mechanics, as was done long since by other theorists. Let us study the phenomena of social frontiers in themselves, but never losing sight of the principles furnished upon this subject by antecedent sciences. This is the real point of the sociological view. This has its foundations in biology, just as biology is based upon the data of antecedent sciences. But it does not follow that the theory of social frontiers can be deduced from biology; in fact, social phenomena present some special characteristics which form the domain of a new and in part distinct science.

Although the general law to which the structure of society conforms is that all organic or living matter has a limit, a form, a structure, this is a most simple, and most general law; it is the first and necessary differentiation of organic and super-organic equilibrium. We will consider here the social structure only from the point of view of its territorial extension, always with reference to the development of population, and to the composition of the two original factors, territory and population. We will consider it only as a whole, in its most general equilibrium; in a word, from the point of view of its limiting envelope. From now on, our theory applies not only to large societies, or even states, in the largest sense of the words, but to all society whatever, large or small, general or particular; in a word, to every collective group, in which are necessarily included elements that are material, anthropological, and even ideal and moral, judicial and political, whatever may be its object, whether purely economic or purely ideal. In fact, we have already developed, in our essay upon *Historic Materialism*, the principle that all social

phenomena, and, for a stronger reason, every society, is at once inorganic, organic, and psychic. This is constant and general, whatever its object. All economic phenomena contain some ideal elements; all ideological phenomena imply some inorganic elements. An economic syndicate differs in this respect from an artistic, religious, or scientific group only from the quantitative point of view; their qualitative composition is the same.

We have seen that the elementary and constitutive factors of all society, territory and population, considered as well in their molecular elements as in their molar aggregation, are always and everywhere limited, both in their structure and in their properties. We can deduce from this that all human society, being only a superior and synthetic combination of these factors and elements and their properties, is equally limited. But it must be remembered that human society is a very complex, superior combination, giving rise to some properties of a special and original character, notably the property of self-development and contractual organization found nowhere else.

The great law of differentiation remains, nevertheless, the most general law of the structure of societies and of their development. The first step of all social formation, as of all organic individualization, is the formation of a contour, a limit, a boundary, at once separative, protective, and *communicating with the exterior*. It is especially this last function of frontiers of which the political theorists have lost sight. They have been, in general, only jurists; but now, just as economic science has been emancipated from the tutelage of theology and of natural right, so it endeavors to free itself from these same jurists and political metaphysicians who for centuries have repeated *ad nauseam* the same absolute principles, forever contradicted by the facts, the solution of the problem of which they have touched only the surface, without penetrating even the coverings. This solution has always escaped them because of their ignorance of the particular social sciences, and especially of social economy. This ignorance has necessarily affected their individual conception of right and politics, because of the necessary interdependence of all the sciences, the law of which they have misunderstood.

This is the origin of that metaphysics which, in all branches of social activity, has led to that imaginary conception of an absolute man, as the sole element of a humanity, equally abstract—a conception where absolute individualism is limited only by an equally absolute cosmopolitanism. Already economic science has got rid of that vague idealism. This was accomplished first by the intervention of the historical and natural schools; secondly and especially, by that of the socialist schools. All, in showing that outside of man and humanity there has been a considerable series of collective and distinctive groups, from the largest societies even to the smallest, from nations even to the most simple professional and other groups; all, I say, have recalled us to the reality of the economic structure and life. The same progress realized in economic science ought justly to be extended to politics and general sociology.

The first degree of every structure is differentiation by the formation of a limit. This is, then, the most general law of every organic and super-organic equilibrium. However, before extending it to society, it is well to study, with regard to that law, social phenomena themselves and social forms in an inductive manner, in order that the demonstration of the law may be perfect when applied to the special character of the structure of society.

The point of departure of the law is certainty that the materials of every society, land, and population, and likewise their properties, are naturally limited. The social material being thus limited, the same as its forces, and, in reality, force and material being identical, societies must likewise be limited. They are, in spite of the size, number, and complexity of combinations, or arrangements and rearrangement, social possibilities. The error has formerly been to consider the form-limit as absolute, fixed, and immutable; or, on the other hand, and in the inverse sense, to deny every form-limit. The truth and the reality are between these two extremes. There is always form; hence always limit. Variability is limited, but, at least, in the state of our sociological knowledge, these limits, though being real, are not always mathematically determinable and definable,

except qualitatively. Perhaps, some day social science like mechanico-physical science may become more precise.

To proceed logically, we will consider the limits of social properties as they are manifested, first, in the seven classes of social phenomena; secondly, in the functions, organs, apparatus, and systems, where their activity is realized and regulated; and, lastly, in the social structures, considered in their entirety. However, we are going to endeavor, at the very first, in order to obtain the greatest possible instruction, to give an account of the conception of the social frontiers which up to this time has been held in beliefs and theories. We will often compare these beliefs and doctrines with the facts themselves. This mode of observation is, however, always necessary in sociology; it is, indeed, the only possible way when the beliefs and the general conceptions of certain peoples can be known only through the interpretation of their acts, that is to say, of their practical life and of their prevailing institutions, where their habitual activity is relatively fixed. This is the case especially with primitive civilization, because of the rudimentary and simple forms of their existence.

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[*To be continued.*]